



## Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

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### *Evidence Summary*

#### **Surveying North American Academic Library Websites for Instructional Outreach and Delivery Reveals a Broad Range of Approaches Employed**

##### **A Review of:**

Yang, S. Q., & Chou, M. (2014). Promoting and teaching information literacy on the Internet: Surveying the web sites of 264 academic libraries in North America. *Journal of Web Librarianship*, 8(1), 88-104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19322909.2014.855586>

##### **Reviewed by:**

Heather Coates

Digital Scholarship & Data Management Librarian

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) University Library

Indianapolis, Indiana, United States of America

Email: [hcoates@iupui.edu](mailto:hcoates@iupui.edu)

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#### **Abstract**

**Objective** – To determine the extent to which academic libraries have used the Web to market and deliver information literacy both as a service and as a concept.

**Design** – Survey of web content.

**Setting** – Websites of North American academic libraries.

**Subjects** – A random sample of 264 libraries selected from *Peterson's Four-Year Colleges*.

**Methods** – The investigators reviewed and analyzed content on academic library websites by recording the presence of various types of information. Presence was recorded for the term information literacy, tutorial content, guides and tests, and delivery of information literacy instruction. The frequencies of tutorials and guides were also reported.

**Main Results** – Approximately 65% of the libraries used their website to promote instruction, while 30% did not mention information literacy or library instruction. A wide range of terminology was used to denote

library instruction, but information literacy was not highly used. Approximately 5% of libraries had no public web presence. Research guides, tutorials, or both were provided by 64% of libraries. More than 300 tutorials in a variety of formats, including Adobe Flash videos, static web pages with little or no animations, webcasts, documents, and presentations were offered by 111 libraries. The tutorials addressed general research topics, databases, concepts and technical skills, among others.

**Conclusion** – While the majority of academic libraries sampled have incorporated information literacy and library instruction into their web presence, it is unclear why nearly one third did not mention these activities. Further study is needed to benchmark how libraries are using the Web for instruction and outreach.

### Commentary

The way academic libraries use their websites to promote information literacy and library instruction is poorly documented. This is due, in part, to the way librarians discuss web and instructional technologies. Such discussions tend to focus on functional aspects of particular platforms (e.g., course management systems, LibGuides, etc.) or delivery mechanisms (e.g., videos, games, etc.). Another challenge in studying this area is that contact with patrons happens across many campus settings, so this broad context is difficult to measure as a whole. This study attempts to document the use of a particular type of web presence (i.e., library websites), but implications for use are unclear due to limitations of the selected method.

In applying the EBL critical appraisal checklist (Glynn, 2006), several concerns arose regarding study validity. The primary limitation of this study is the assumption that library websites provide an accurate gauge of a library's

information literacy outreach and instructional activities. For example, the methods employed in this study would not capture instruction that is described or delivered in other sites such as course management systems and LibGuides. It is difficult to assess the quality of the data reported due to a lack of rationale for the selected methods and insufficient procedural detail for data collection and coding. Although the data collection spreadsheet is included in the appendix, it is not clear how the authors gathered data from the library websites. Was library content on other public platforms or websites included? How did the investigators browse or search the web content? How did the investigators ensure inter-coder reliability? The answers to these questions have a significant impact on the validity of the study, which is questionable based on the available information.

Further research on the use of various web platforms to promote and deliver information literacy instruction is necessary to identify effective outreach and instructional strategies for various student populations. First, we must clarify the distinction between raising awareness of library services and information literacy advocacy and instruction. Second, in examining the library use of various platforms, we also need to be cognizant of the fact that very few students start their research at the library homepage (Timpson & Sansom, 2011). Unfortunately, this study does not deliver immediately usable results for academic librarians. It does provide valuable lessons for future research, including the importance of developing focused and answerable research questions. There is also a need for longitudinal surveys to characterize the broad landscape of library technology use for instruction and outreach.

### References

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399.

Timpson, H. & Sansom, G. (2011). A student perspective on e-resource discovery: Has the Google factor changed publisher platform searching forever? *The Serials Librarian: From the Printed Page to the Digital Age*, 61(2), 253-266. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0361526X.2011.592115>